

**Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, February 27, 2023**  
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**Frederick W. Kagan**  
**February 27, 8:15pm ET**

Click [here](#) to see ISW's interactive map of the Russian invasion of Ukraine. This map is updated daily alongside the static maps present in this report.

**Russian officials are promoting an information operation that falsely frames Russia's war in Ukraine as existential to the continued existence of the Russian Federation.** In an interview with TV channel Rossiya-1 on February 26, Russian President Vladimir Putin warned that he does not know if "such an ethnic group as the Russian people can survive in the form in which it exists today" if the West succeeds in "destroying the Russian Federation and establishing control over its fragments."<sup>1</sup> Putin accused the collective West of already having plans "set out on paper" for the destruction of the Russian Federation in its current form.<sup>2</sup> Putin also remarked that Russia had to suspend its participation in the START treaty in order to ensure its strategic stability and security in the face of a concerted Western effort to use START to cripple Russia's strategic prospects.<sup>3</sup>

Putin began to set conditions for the perpetuation of this information operation in his speech to the Federal Assembly on February 21, where he blamed the collective West for using the war in Ukraine to threaten the existence of the Russian Federation.<sup>4</sup> Deputy Chairman of the Russian Security Council Dmitry Medvedev invoked similarly existential sentiments in an essay entitled "Points of No Return" published on February 27 in which he accused the West of fueling the current situation in Ukraine since the fall of the Soviet Union and concluded that "the calm power of our great country and the authority of its partners are the key to preserving the future of our entire world."<sup>5</sup> Both Putin's and Medvedev's statements engage with an information operation that frames the war in Ukraine as existential to the continued survival of the post-Soviet Russian Federation, which is likely an attempt to present the war as having higher stakes for Russia and the West than it actually does. Putin likely hopes to set informational conditions to accuse Ukraine and the West of threatening the survival of the Russian Federation in response to Russian military failures and Western support for Ukrainian victories. No prominent Western official has called for the dissolution of the Russian Federation, and Western leaders have been very careful to articulate their aims as being to enable Ukraine to liberate all its territory at most. Putin's language is designed to fuel support for the war in Russia and stoke fears in the West of the instability that would follow the collapse of Russia to deter Western support to Ukraine and persuade the West to coerce Kyiv into accepting Russian demands.

**Russian officials continue to engage in information operations in an attempt to discourage the Western provision of military aid to Ukraine.** Russian Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu stated during a TV interview with Rossiya-1 on February 26 that the types of weapons that the West decides to provide to Ukraine will determine how far Russian troops will need to "push the threat away" from Russian borders.<sup>6</sup> Putin made a similar statement in his February 21 address to the Federal Assembly.<sup>7</sup> These statements are likely meant to discourage the West from providing long-range systems to Ukraine by suggesting that the provision of such systems will protract the war

by "forcing" Russia to take more Ukrainian territory to be "safe." ISW has previously reported on concerted Russian information operations to discourage Western military aid to Ukraine.<sup>8</sup>

**Ukrainian military officials continue to respond to Western concerns about Ukrainian capabilities to liberate Ukrainian people and land and suggest that Ukrainian forces are preparing for a spring counteroffensive in southern Ukraine.** Ukrainian Deputy Head of the Main Military Intelligence Directorate (GUR) Vadim Skibitskyi stated on February 26 that Ukrainian forces will be ready for a counteroffensive in spring 2023 and that one Ukrainian strategic goal is to split the Russian frontline between Crimea and mainland Russia. Skibitskyi noted that the supply of Western military aid is one decisive factor in determining the timing of a Ukrainian counteroffensive. Western officials and news outlets have recently expressed a degree of doubt about Ukrainian forces' ability to conduct a counteroffensive and the West's ability to provide long-term military aid to Ukraine, as ISW has previously reported.<sup>9</sup> ISW's prior assessments of Russian military capabilities along the Zaporizhia Oblast front line suggest that there are opportunities for Ukraine to conduct a counter-offensive in that strategically vital region.<sup>10</sup>

**A reportedly captured Russian military manual suggests that Russian forces are implementing new assault tactics to compensate for current combat power limitations in response to continued offensive failures.** A Ukrainian reserve officer posted a picture on February 26 reportedly of a captured Russian manual that details the tactics of a newly minted "assault detachment," which is a battalion-sized element that has been optimized for frontal assaults on fortified areas.<sup>11</sup> The assault detachment formation reportedly fields six T-72 main battle tanks, 12 infantry fighting vehicles, and a collection of man-portable thermobaric rocket launchers, anti-tank guided missile systems, towed artillery, and self-propelled mortars.<sup>12</sup> The assault detachment appears to be comprised of three assault companies and a tank section.<sup>13</sup> Each assault company has a command element, two assault "platoons" (at far below normal platoon strength), a UAV team, an armored fighting vehicle (AFV) group, a fire support platoon and an artillery support platoon, a reserve section, and a medevac section. Each company fields one tank and four BMP/BMD-2 infantry fighting vehicles, with anti-tank launchers, heavy machine guns, and mortars. The Ukrainian reserve officer remarked that assault "platoons" of 12 to 15 people, divided into tactical groups of three people, are the formation's primary maneuver elements.<sup>14</sup> The assault detachment reportedly conducts assaults within less than a minute of the time when artillery fire begins on open fortified positions, with the platoon commander controlling mortar fire.

**The manual suggests that Russian forces are trying to adapt maneuver forces into smaller and more agile military formations than were employed earlier in the war.** The Ukrainian reserve officer noted that this new tactical formation suggests that Russian forces have replaced the defunct battalion tactical group (BTG) with these smaller and more agile maneuver formations. The manual suggests that Russian forces are using T-72 tanks for direct fire support from the rear rather than as integral parts of a combined arms team. The increased reliance on dismounted infantry and the relegation of tanks to fire support from the rear indicates that Russian military leadership is prioritizing protecting main battle tanks over protecting infantry, which is reflective of recent reports of massive equipment losses that Russian armor units sustained over the first year of the war.<sup>15</sup> The manual indicates that the Russian military is resorting to employing a form of simplified combined arms warfare that has likely been pared down to compensate for the overall

degradation of Russian manpower and equipment capacity and which is easier for inexperienced and untrained mobilized personnel slotted into such detachments to employ.

**The tactics of the assault detachment additionally suggest that the Russian military may be attempting to institutionalize practices used to marginal tactical effect by the Wagner Group in Bakhmut.** The Ukrainian reserve officer suggested that this new formation is likely partially influenced by Wagner Group operations around Bakhmut.<sup>16</sup> ISW has previously reported on the fact that Wagner has largely relied on squad-sized frontal assaults, which have decreased the reliance on massed fires as Russian artillery and equipment stocks have dwindled.<sup>17</sup> The Wagner Group's highly attritional offensive on Bakhmut has failed to gain operationally significant ground, so the institutionalization of elements of Wagner's tactics will likely further normalize attritional frontal assaults. Such tactics are likely to waste Russian combat power and not effectively counter conventional Ukrainian battalions and brigades. Assault detachments may be able to make tactical gains at cost due to their simplicity but will likely culminate rapidly due to their small size and attritional tactics. Russian forces are unlikely to make operationally significant breakthroughs rapidly with this formation.

**US Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) Director William Burns stated on February 25 that the CIA is confident that Chinese leadership is considering the provision of lethal equipment to Russia but has not made a final decision.**<sup>18</sup> In an interview with *CBS News*, Burns stated that the CIA has not seen evidence of Chinese shipments of lethal equipment to Russia. Burns also stated that the US government chose to make the CIA's assessment public in order to deter China from sending lethal weapons to Russia.

### Key Takeaways

- **Russian officials are promoting an information operation that falsely frames Russia's war in Ukraine as existential to the continued existence of the Russian Federation.**
- **Russian officials continue to conduct information operations in an attempt to discourage the Western provision of military aid to Ukraine.**
- **Ukrainian military officials continue to respond to Western concerns over Ukrainian capabilities and suggest that Ukrainian forces are preparing for a spring counteroffensive in southern Ukraine.**
- **A reportedly captured Russian military manual suggests that Russian forces are implementing new assault tactics to compensate for the current limitations on combat capability in light of continued offensive failures.**
- **The manual suggests that Russian forces are trying to adopt smaller and more agile combined arms formations than were employed earlier in the war.**
- **The tactics of the assault detachment additionally suggest that the Russian military may be attempting to institutionalize tactics used to marginal tactical effect by the Wagner Group in Bakhmut.**
- **US Central Intelligence Director William Burns stated on February 25 that the CIA is confident that Chinese leadership is considering the provision of lethal equipment to Russia but has not made a final decision or provided lethal aid to Russia.**

- **Ukrainian officials stated that Russian forces have been concentrating and escalating operations along the Luhansk Oblast front line.**
- **Russian forces continued to conduct ground attacks northwest of Svatove and near Kreminna.**
- **Russian forces continued to conduct ground attacks across the Donetsk Oblast front line, and Russian sources widely claimed that Wagner Group forces made territorial gains north of Bakhmut.**
- **Ukrainian officials reported that Russian forces continue to focus on establishing defensive fortifications in east (left) bank Kherson Oblast and Crimea.**
- **Russian forces are continuing to expend their already limited stocks of precision munitions.**
- **Russian officials announced that all social support measures will enter into force in occupied territories on March 1.**

# Assessed Control of Terrain in Ukraine and Main Russian Maneuver Axes as of February 27, 2023, 3:00 PM ET



***We do not report in detail on Russian war crimes because those activities are well-covered in Western media and do not directly affect the military operations we are assessing and forecasting. We will continue to evaluate and report on the effects of these criminal activities on the Ukrainian military and population and specifically on combat in Ukrainian urban areas. We utterly condemn these Russian violations of the laws of armed conflict, Geneva Conventions, and humanity even though we do not describe them in these reports.***

- Russian Main Effort—Eastern Ukraine (comprised of two subordinate main efforts)
- Russian Subordinate Main Effort #1—Capture the remainder of Luhansk Oblast and push westward into eastern Kharkiv Oblast and encircle northern Donetsk Oblast
- Russian Subordinate Main Effort #2—Capture the entirety of Donetsk Oblast
- Russian Supporting Effort—Southern Axis
- Russian Mobilization and Force Generation Efforts
- Activities in Russian-occupied Areas

### **Russian Main Effort—Eastern Ukraine**

#### **Russian Subordinate Main Effort #1— Luhansk Oblast (Russian objective: Capture the remainder of Luhansk Oblast and continue offensive operations into eastern Kharkiv Oblast and northern Donetsk Oblast)**

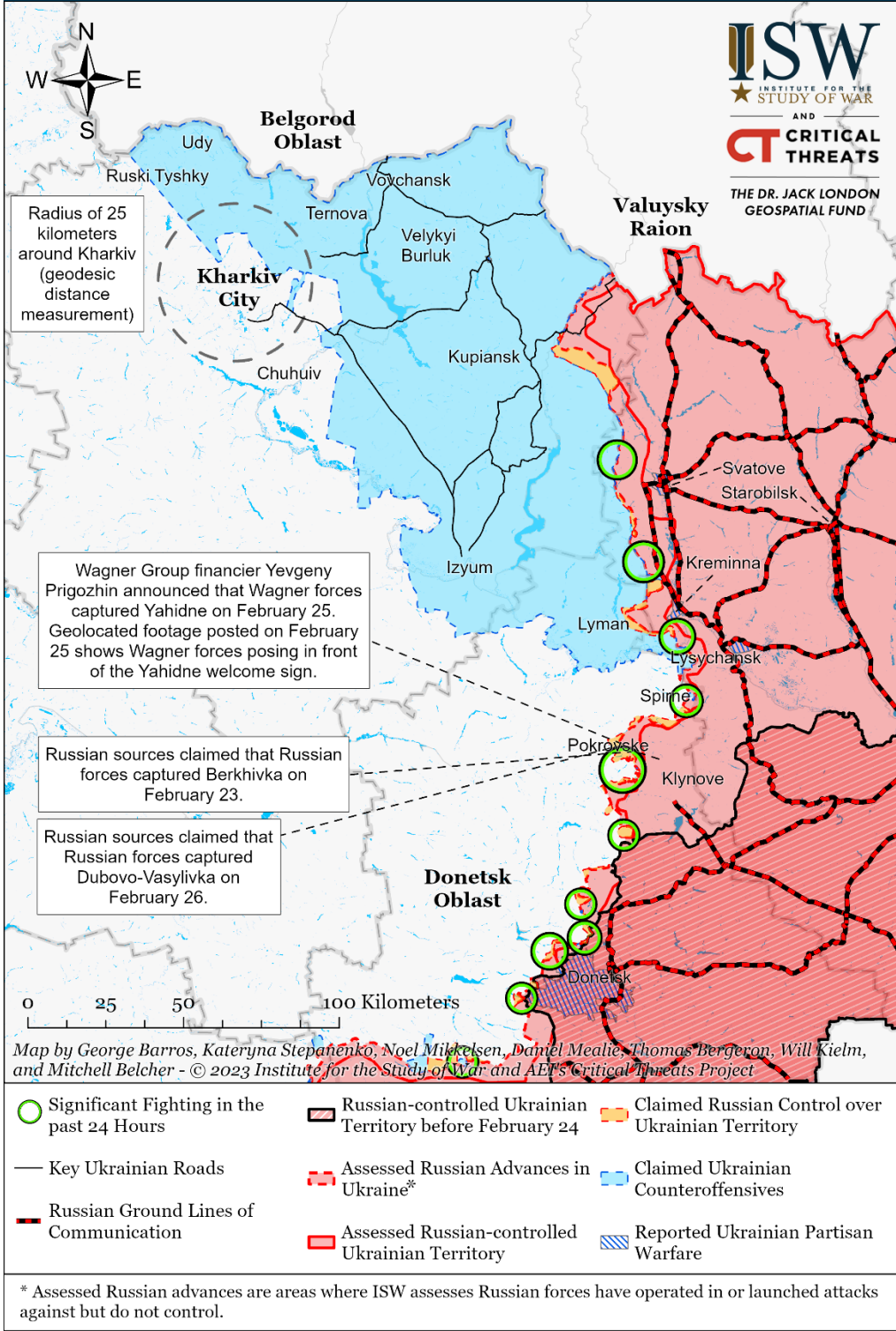
Ukrainian officials stated that Russian forces have been concentrating and escalating operations along the Luhansk Oblast frontline. Ukrainian Eastern Group of Forces Spokesperson Colonel Serhiy Cherevaty stated on February 26 that Russian forces concentrated infantry, airborne (VDV), and Luhansk People’s Republic (LNR) forces in eastern Ukraine and have attempted to use armored vehicles in combat in the past several weeks.<sup>19</sup> The Ukrainian General Staff reported on February 27 that Russian forces deployed 200 conscript recruits from Rostov Oblast to Luhansk Oblast on an unspecified date.<sup>20</sup> Ukrainian Luhansk Oblast Head Serhiy Haidai stated on February 27 that Russian forces have escalated operations in the Svatove, Kreminna, and Bilohorivka directions in recent weeks and have been concentrating equipment and reserves in occupied Luhansk Oblast.<sup>21</sup>

Russian forces conducted limited ground attacks northwest of Svatove on February 26 and 27. The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Russian forces conducted unsuccessful offensive operations near Masyutivka (52km northwest of Svatove), Novoselivske (16km northwest of Svatove), and Stelmakhivka (17km northwest of Svatove) on February 26 and 27.<sup>22</sup>

Russian forces continued ground attacks near Kreminna on February 26 and 27. The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Russian forces conducted unsuccessful offensive operations near Kreminna, northwest of Kreminna near Ploshchanka (17km northwest) and Nevske (18km northwest); west of Kreminna near Torske (14km west); southwest of Kreminna near Dibrova (6km southwest); south of Kreminna near Bilohorivka (12km south); and near the Serebrianska forest area (11km south) on February 26 and 27.<sup>23</sup> Geolocated footage suggests that Russian forces have likely pushed Ukrainian forces west from the R66 near Pishchane and Chervonopopivka (5-6km northwest of Kreminna).<sup>24</sup> A Russian source claimed that Ukrainian forces repelled Russian ground attacks in the Bilohorivka, Zarichne, Yampolivka, Terny, and Makiivka directions.<sup>25</sup> A Kremlin-affiliated

milblogger claimed that Russian forces along the Svatove-Kreminna-Bilohorivka-Lysychansk line have adopted a new approach to make gradual advances, which is consistent with reports of a new Russian maneuver element that can only advance at the pace of dismounted infantry and whose attacks will culminate quickly before securing significant gains.<sup>26</sup>

# Assessed Control of Terrain Around Kharkiv as of February 27, 2023, 3:00 PM ET





## **Russian Subordinate Main Effort #2—Donetsk Oblast (Russian objective: Capture the entirety of Donetsk Oblast, the claimed territory of Russia’s proxies in Donbas)**

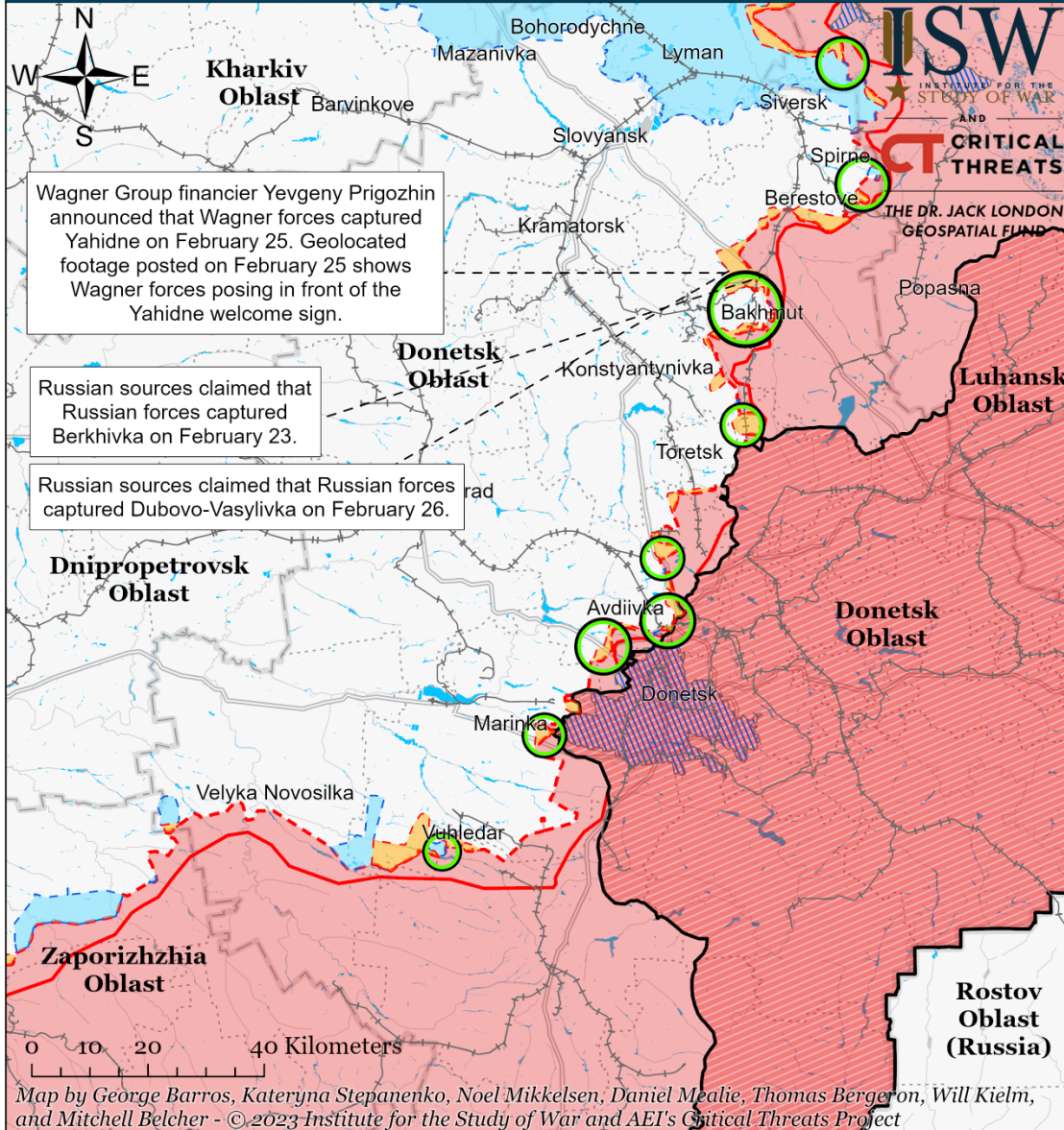
Russian forces continued ground attacks around Bakhmut on February 26 and 27. The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Russian forces conducted unsuccessful attacks on Bakhmut itself; north of Bakhmut near Vasyukivka (13km north), Zaliznianske (8km north), Dubovo-Vasylivka (6km northwest), Orikhovo-Vasylivka (10km northwest), Berkhivka (4km north), Yahidne (1km northwest), and Bohdanivka (8km northwest); west of Bakhmut near Ivanivske (5km west); and southwest of Bakhmut near Stupochky (12km southwest) and Pivnichne (20km southwest) between February 26 and 27.<sup>27</sup> Ukrainian Eastern Group of Forces Spokesperson Colonel Serhiy Cherevaty noted that Russian forces conducted 32 ground attacks around Bakhmut and 14 within the city on February 26.<sup>28</sup> Russian sources widely claimed that Wagner Group forces made gains north of Bakhmut on both February 26 and 27. Several Russian milbloggers claimed that Wagner took control of Yahidne, advanced south of the Berkhivka reservoir, and moved westward to threaten Bohdanivka.<sup>29</sup> Milbloggers claimed that Russian advances north and northwest of Bakhmut will allow Russian forces to threaten the Khromove-Bakhmut route, with several Russian milbloggers indicating that Russian troops have taken at least part of the route under fire control.<sup>30</sup> Donetsk People’s Republic (DNR) advisor Igor Kimakovsky claimed that Wagner forces are moving closer to the center of Bakhmut itself, and a Russian milblogger claimed that Wagner has made gains on the eastern outskirts of Bakhmut and toward Koperatyvna Vulystia, which is near Bakhmut’s city center.<sup>31</sup> Russian sources additionally claimed that Wagner continued assaults toward Ivanivske on both February 26 and 27.<sup>32</sup> Former Russian officer and prominent critical milblogger Igor Girkin remarked on February 27 that current Russian assaults on Bakhmut are useless and will exhaust Russian troops without taking strategically significant ground.<sup>33</sup>

Russian forces continued ground attacks in the Avdiivka-Donetsk City area on February 26 and 27. The Ukrainian General Staff reported that Russian troops conducted unsuccessful attacks north of Donetsk City near Avdiivka, Sieverne, and Kamianka, on the northwestern outskirts of Donetsk City near Vodyane, Nevelske, and Krasnohorivka, and on the southwestern outskirts of Donetsk City near Marinka.<sup>34</sup> Russian sources claimed that Russian forces are expanding their zone of control northeast of Avdiivka near Novobakhmutivka, but noted that this advance is bounded by the H20 Donetsk City-Kostyantynivka highway, which Russian forces have not yet crossed.<sup>35</sup> A Russian milblogger noted that the DNR’s "Somalia" battalion is moving toward Avdiivka.<sup>36</sup> Russian milbloggers additionally discussed efforts of the DNR’s 5<sup>th</sup> Brigade within Marinka on February 26 and 27 and claimed that Russian troops successfully pushed Ukrainian troops out of positions in western Marinka.<sup>37</sup>

Russian forces continued ground attacks in western Donetsk Oblast on February 26 and 27. The Ukrainian General Staff stated that Russian troops conducted unsuccessful offensive operations near Vuhledar (30km southwest of Donetsk City) on February 27.<sup>38</sup> Geolocated footage posted on February 25 and 26 shows that Russian forces made minor advances on an unspecified date directly south of Vuhledar.<sup>39</sup> Russian milbloggers continued to discuss intense positional battles in the Vuhledar area, with one source claiming that Russian naval infantry elements are fighting toward Vuhledar from Mykilske, just southeast of Vuhledar.<sup>40</sup> A Russian milblogger circulated footage on February 26 of Eastern Military District (EMD) Commander Rustam Muradov and Russian Far Eastern Federal District representative Yuri Trutnev presenting naval infantry forces in the Vuhledar direction with service awards, supporting ISW’s observation that this axis is the area of responsibility of EMD and naval infantry elements.<sup>41</sup> The former DNR Militia spokesperson (who was reportedly recently

dismissed from his post) visited the Vuhledar area on February 26 and noted that it is important for Russian forces to defend against Ukrainian counterattacks in this area because Ukraine wants to cut Russian supply routes to occupied Crimea.<sup>42</sup> Ukrainian Tavriisk Defense Group spokesperson Colonel Oleksiy Dmytrashkivskyi noted that the pace of Russian operations in the Vuhledar area has overall decreased over the past four days due to poor weather and noted that Russian forces only conducted 17 ground attacks near Vuhledar on February 27.<sup>43</sup>

# Assessed Control of Terrain Around Donetsk as of February 27, 2023, 3:00 PM ET



- Significant Fighting in the past 24 Hours
- Assessed Russian-controlled Ukrainian Territory
- Russian-controlled Ukrainian Territory before February 24
- Assessed Russian Advances in Ukraine\*
- Claimed Russian Control over Ukrainian Territory
- Claimed Ukrainian Counteroffensives
- + Major Railroads
- Reported Ukrainian Partisan Warfare

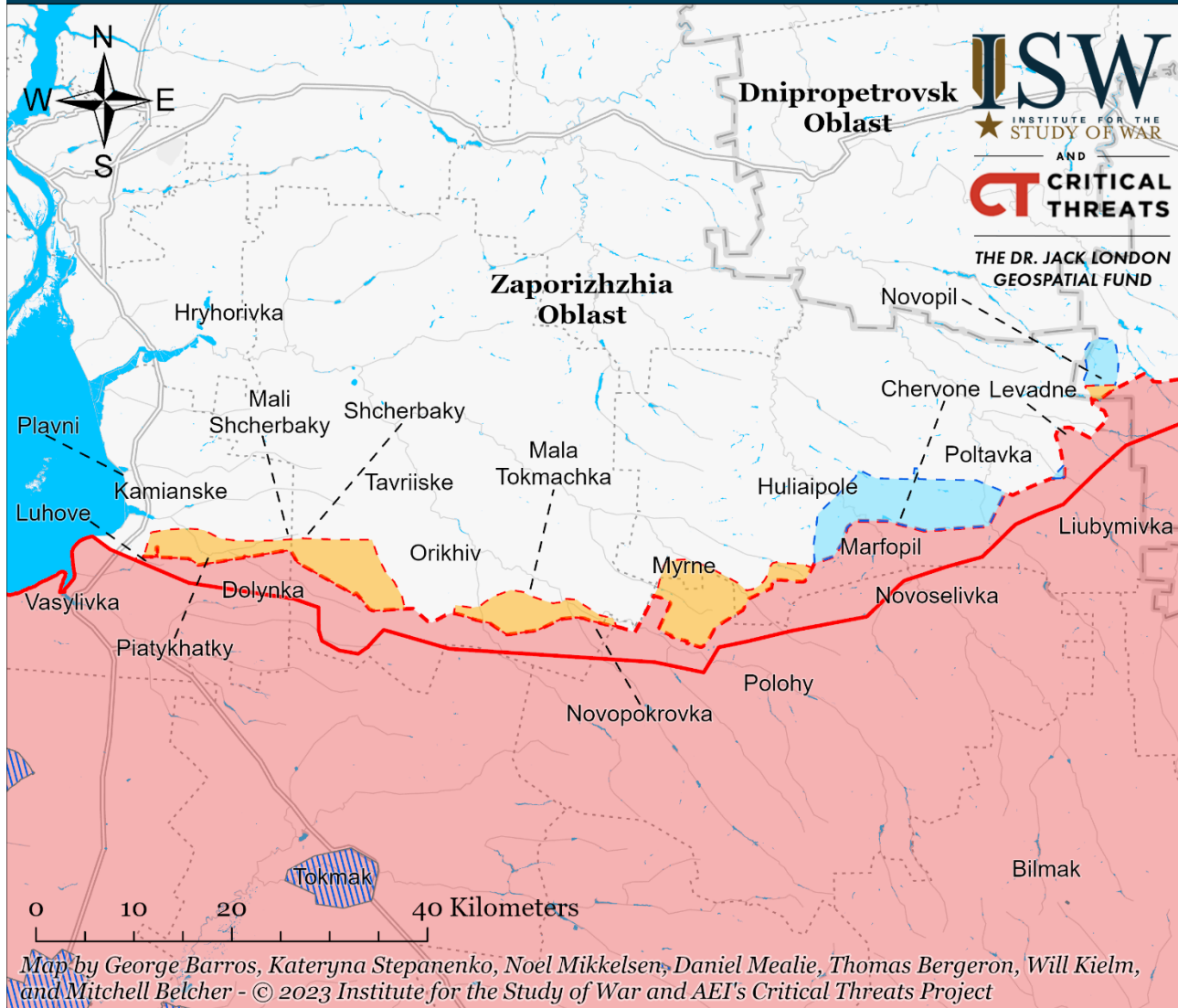
\* Assessed Russian advances are areas where ISW assesses Russian forces have operated in or launched attacks against but do not control.

**Supporting Effort—Southern Axis (Russian objective: Maintain frontline positions and secure rear areas against Ukrainian strikes)**

Ukrainian officials reported that Russian forces continue to focus on establishing defensive fortifications in east (left) bank Kherson Oblast and in occupied Crimea. Head of the Ukrainian Joint Coordination Press Center of the Southern Forces Nataliya Humenyuk stated on February 26 that Russian forces tried and failed to mine islands in the Dnipro River Delta and that Russian forces are dispersing forces to move further from the Dnipro River bank.<sup>44</sup> Humenyuk also stated that Russian forces continue equipping engineering and defensive fortifications in Crimea. The Ukrainian General Staff reported on February 26 that Russian forces are increasing efforts to build defenses in Crimea and have transported 150 personnel from Chelyabinsk Oblast to perform engineering work in Crimea.<sup>45</sup> Satellite imagery dated February 25 shows that Russian forces recently established trenches and roadblocks along the M17 and T-2202 highways approaching Armiansk from the northwest.<sup>46</sup>

Russian forces continued to conduct routine fire west of Hulyaipole and in Kherson, Mykolaiv, and Dnipropetrovsk oblasts on February 26 and 27.<sup>47</sup> Ukraine's Southern Operational Command South reported on February 27 that Russian forces conducted 100 artillery attacks over the past day, including against the Dnipro River estuary and Mykolaiv Oblast coastal areas.<sup>48</sup>

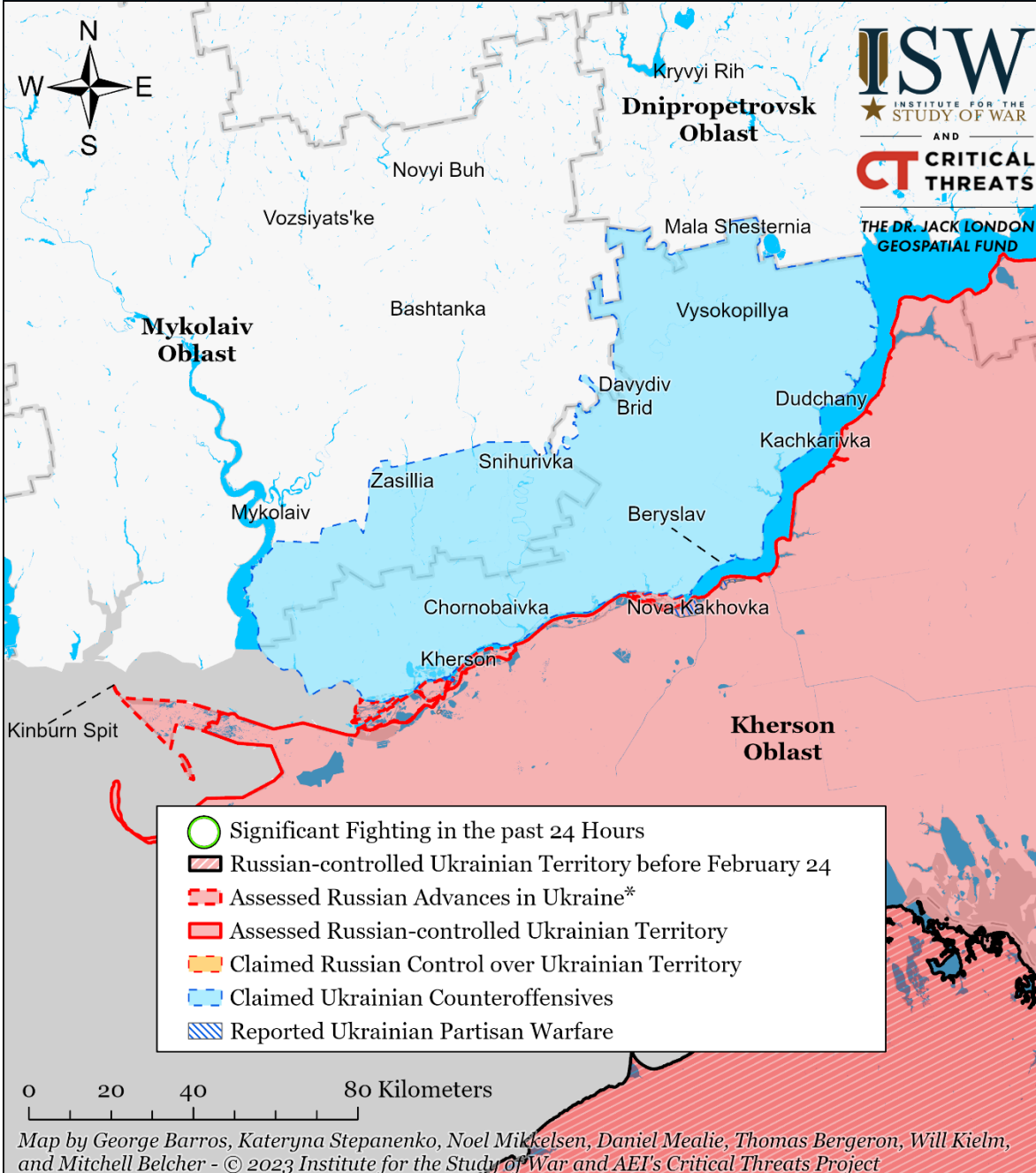
# Assessed Control of Terrain Around Zaporizhzhia as of February 27, 2023, 3:00 PM ET



- Significant Fighting in the past 24 Hours
- Assessed Russian-controlled Ukrainian Territory
- Reported Ukrainian Partisan Warfare
- Russian-controlled Ukrainian Territory before February 24
- Claimed Russian Control over Ukrainian Territory
- Assessed Russian Advances in Ukraine\*
- Claimed Ukrainian Counteroffensives

\* Assessed Russian advances are areas where ISW assesses Russian forces have operated in or launched attacks against but do not control.

# Assessed Control of Terrain Around Kherson and Mykolaiv as of February 27, 2023, 3:00 PM ET



\* Assessed Russian advances are areas where ISW assesses Russian forces have operated in or launched attacks against but do not control.

## **Mobilization and Force Generation Efforts (Russian objective: Expand combat power without conducting general mobilization)**

Russian forces are continuing to expend their already limited stocks of precision munitions. Ukrainian Main Intelligence Directorate (GUR) Representative Andrii Chernyak stated that Russian forces use missiles at a faster rate than they can produce them.<sup>49</sup> Chernyak stated that Russian forces can produce no more than 30-40 cruise missiles per month and have fewer than 100 Kh-101 and Kh-555 high-precision missiles remaining. ISW previously assessed that Russian forces continue to expend increasingly limited stocks of precision munitions.<sup>50</sup>

Mobilized personnel continue to air their grievances with Russian military leadership in regard to their subordination to formations of the Donetsk People's Republic (DNR). Mobilized servicemen of the 5th, 6th, 7th, and 8th Companies of the 2nd Battalion of the 1439th Regiment from Irkutsk Oblast released their third appeal video to Russian President Vladimir Putin on February 25 protesting their subordination to the DNR's 1st Slavic Brigade.<sup>51</sup> The servicemen claimed that Russian authorities told them that they would serve in a territorial defense unit but that they were instead assigned to assault detachments, in which they are forced to storm Ukrainian forces' strongholds and fortify areas along the front under threat of death for non-compliance.<sup>52</sup> The personnel also claimed that DNR evacuation groups would only evacuate DNR personnel or those with minor injuries.<sup>53</sup> ISW previously reported that some servicemen from the 1231st Regiment of Tatarstan who publicly appealed for removal from DNR command were resubordinated under DNR command likely as punishment.<sup>54</sup> Evident fracture lines between Russian mobilized personnel and DNR formations appear to be growing.

Russian officials continue efforts to formalize militia formations of the Donetsk and Luhansk People's Republics (DNR and LNR). United Russia General Council Secretary Andrei Turchak announced that the Working Group on the "Special Military Operation" submitted two bills to the State Duma – the first would recognize militia members who participated in operations in Donbas from 2014 onwards as official participants in military operations; the second would grant participants of the war and their families free legal assistance in state legal bureaus.<sup>55</sup> Wagner Group financier Yevgeny Prigozhin appeared to attempt to use these formalization measures to improve benefits for Wagner personnel and increase the Russian government's recognition of Wagner. Prigozhin claimed that Putin has already ordered the preparation of documents stating that volunteers, including Wagner fighters, who die at the front receive the same rights as Russian military personnel.<sup>56</sup>

A Ukrainian source confirmed that the 155th Naval Infantry Brigade has suffered continually catastrophic losses in assaults on Vuhledar. The Ukrainian Resistance Center cited a prisoner-of-war interview with a 155th Naval Infantry Brigade infantryman who claimed that the brigade lost 6,800 people during the year (even though the brigade has a total complement of 1,200). The infantryman stated that the brigade has undergone seven or eight reformations and received recruits from volunteers, mobilized, convicts, and Pacific Fleet sailors who were removed from ships.<sup>57</sup>

## **Activity in Russian-occupied Areas (Russian objective: consolidate administrative**

**control of and annexed areas; forcibly integrate Ukrainian civilians into Russian sociocultural, economic, military, and governance systems)**

Russian officials announced on February 27 that all social support measures will begin to operate in occupied territories on March 1. Russia's ruling United Russia Party announced on February 27 that all residents in occupied territories will receive pensions and payments for children, free medical care, and other social benefits starting on March 1.<sup>58</sup> United Russia also stated that primary school students in occupied territories will receive academic and social scholarships, as well as free hot meals and textbooks. United Russia stated that the transition period will last from March 1, 2023, to February 29, 2024.<sup>59</sup> ISW has previously assessed that such social benefit schemes increase social and bureaucratic control of occupied territories by forcing Ukrainian citizens to register and interact with occupation administration organs to receive benefits and additionally foster dependencies on occupation administrations for social support.<sup>60</sup>

Russian officials continue to deport Ukrainian children to Russian territory and subject them to various social programming schemes. Independent Russian news outlet *Dozhd* reported on February 26 that it identified communications between the Russian Ministry of Education and regional guardianship authorities revealing that Russian officials forcibly deported 400 Ukrainian children to Russian territory in August 2022.<sup>61</sup> *Dozhd* reported that 36 children had been placed into foster care by mid-January 2023 and that boarding schools received instructions not to place the children with families with Russian citizenship.<sup>62</sup> *Dozhd* also stated that Russian officials are subjecting the children to Russian patriotic-military education programs.<sup>63</sup> ISW maintains that the deportation and adoption of Ukrainian children into Russian families may constitute a violation of the Geneva Convention of the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide, as well as a component of a wider ethnic cleansing campaign.

**Significant activity in Belarus (ISW assesses that a Russian or Belarusian attack into northern Ukraine in early 2023 is extraordinarily unlikely and has thus restructured this section of the update. It will no longer include counter-indicators for such an offensive.**

**ISW will continue to report daily observed Russian and Belarusian military activity in Belarus, but these are not indicators that Russian and Belarusian forces are preparing for an imminent attack on Ukraine from Belarus. ISW will revise this text and its assessment if it observes any unambiguous indicators that Russia or Belarus is preparing to attack northern Ukraine.)**

Unspecified actors – reportedly Belarusian partisans – reportedly disabled a Russian Air Force Beriev A-50 airborne early warning and control plane at the Machulishchi Air Base in Minsk, Belarus, on February 26. Multiple Belarusian opposition sources and Russian military bloggers reported that Belarusian partisans attacked the plane with explosives dropped from a UAV.<sup>64</sup> There is no visual evidence or official confirmation of the attack as of this publication. Latvian-based Russian-language opposition outlet *Meduza* reported that military personnel, ambulances, investigators, traffic police, and a helicopter were present at the airfield following the attack, and that riot police searched nearby homes to apprehend saboteurs who may have conducted the attack.<sup>65</sup> Available satellite images confirm



that a Russian A-50 was at the Machulishchi Air Base as of February 19.<sup>66</sup> The Russian military reportedly operates only about 10 airworthy A-50 aircraft.<sup>67</sup>

Russian equipment in Belarus reportedly redeployed from Belarus to Rostov Oblast, Russia. Independent Belarusian monitoring organization The Hajun Project reported that a Russian train with military equipment and about 250 Russian military personnel departed Slonim, Grodno Oblast, Belarus, for Rostov Oblast on February 26.<sup>68</sup> The Hajun Project reported that the equipment should arrive in Neklinovka, Rostov Oblast on March 5.<sup>69</sup>

Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko will likely cede elements of Belarus' defense industrial base to support Russian defense industry sanctions evasion as a concession in exchange for not committing the Belarusian military to join the Russian invasion of Ukraine.<sup>70</sup> Lukashenko claimed that threats to Belarus require Belarus to intensify its domestic military industrial production.<sup>71</sup> Lukashenko noted that the Belarusian defense industry can produce weapons since Belarus has access to microelectronics, optics, and other component imports from post-Soviet states who kept their Soviet stocks of these items.<sup>72</sup> Lukashenko noted that Belarus must develop its capabilities to produce modern strike UAVs.<sup>73</sup> Lukashenko may facilitate sanctions evasion schemes between Russia and China during his planned visit to Beijing this week.<sup>74</sup>

**Note: ISW does not receive any classified material from any source, uses only publicly available information, and draws extensively on Russian, Ukrainian, and Western reporting and social media as well as commercially available satellite imagery and other geospatial data as the basis for these reports. References to all sources used are provided in the endnotes of each update.**

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<sup>1</sup> <https://smotrim dot ru/brand/63170>; <https://tass dot ru/politika/17143665>

<sup>2</sup> <https://smotrim dot ru/brand/63170>; <https://tass dot ru/politika/17143665>

<sup>3</sup> [https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/putin-says-russia-cannot-ignore-nato-nuclear-capability/2023/02/26/268274d4-b5dc-11ed-b0df-8ca14de679ad\\_story.html](https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/putin-says-russia-cannot-ignore-nato-nuclear-capability/2023/02/26/268274d4-b5dc-11ed-b0df-8ca14de679ad_story.html) ; <https://tass dot com/politics/1581683> ; <https://tass dot com/politics/1581691> ; <https://tass dot com/politics/1581695>

<sup>4</sup> <http://kremlin dot ru/events/president/news/70565>; <https://www.understandingwar.org/backgrounder/russian-offensive-campaign-assessment-february-21-2023>

<sup>5</sup> <https://iz dot ru/1475574/dmitrii-medvedev/tochki-nevozvrat>

<sup>6</sup> <https://smotrim dot ru/brand/63170>; <https://tass dot ru/armiya-i-opk/17144481>

<sup>7</sup> <https://tass dot ru/politika/17102895>; <http://kremlin dot ru/events/president/news/70565>;

<https://www.understandingwar.org/backgrounder/russian-offensive-campaign-assessment-february-21-2023>

<sup>8</sup> <https://isw.pub/UkrWar020623>; <https://isw.pub/UkrWar020223>

<sup>9</sup> <https://www.understandingwar.org/backgrounder/russian-offensive-campaign-assessment-february-14-2023>;

<https://www.understandingwar.org/backgrounder/russian-offensive-campaign-assessment-february-25-2023>

<sup>10</sup> <https://www.understandingwar.org/backgrounder/russian-offensive-campaign-assessment-january-25-2023>;

<https://www.understandingwar.org/backgrounder/russian-offensive-campaign-assessment-february-10-2023>;

<https://www.understandingwar.org/backgrounder/russian-offensive-campaign-assessment-january-31-2023>;

<https://www.understandingwar.org/backgrounder/russian-offensive-campaign-assessment-january-27-2023>;

<https://www.understandingwar.org/backgrounder/russian-offensive-campaign-assessment-january-21-2023>;

<https://www.understandingwar.org/backgrounder/russian-offensive-campaign-assessment-january-23-2023>

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<sup>11</sup> [https://twitter.com/Tatarigami\\_UA/status/1629722073487613953](https://twitter.com/Tatarigami_UA/status/1629722073487613953)

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